Remembering Karen Eklund, IHM  
Dec. 7, 1940 – Nov. 3, 2015

Beverly Ann Eklund was born on Dec. 7, 1940, in Detroit, Mich., to Albert Samuel Eklund and Mildred Rosalie Delar. She was baptized at Annunciation Parish in Detroit and given the name Beverly Ann. She has an older sister and brother, Joann and Raymond.

Beverly attended St. Raymond Grade School and Girls’ Catholic Central High School, both in Detroit. High school classmate, Sister Margaret Hughes, described her as a pleasant, happy person, a good student and involved in many school activities such as student government, sodality, choral and plays. Outside of school times, Beverly worked at St. Raymond’s rectory and then at a neighborhood store that had a soda fountain. Her sister, Joann, said that is where Beverly got her love for hot fudge sundaes. She was the maid of honor for her sister’s wedding and later godmother for her first niece, Colleen, in 1967.

She entered the IHM postulate on Sept. 6, 1958, and the novitiate June 28, 1959, where she was given the name Sister Karen. She made her first profession of vows on June 29, 1961 and her final profession on June 29, 1966.

In 1963, Sister Karen began 13 years of teaching in primary grades at the Detroit schools of Our Lady Queen of Hope, St. Francis de Sales and St. Mary of Redford. Sister's faculty companions described her as an excellent teacher, loved by the children, kind, fun-loving, beautiful to live with and a lover of community. Consideration of others, especially elders, was noticeable early on. Sister's classmate, Sister Rose Graham, tells that she lived with Sister Karen at St. Mary of Redford. When Rose’s mother would travel from Flint to Detroit to visit her daughter, Sister Karen would visit with Mrs. Graham too. When Sister Rose left for the foreign missions and Mrs. Graham came to Detroit for something, Sister Karen would go to lunch with her and help keep the IHM connections.

From 1976 to 1986, Sister Karen ministered as director of religious education at St. Ephrem Parish in Sterling Heights, Mich. Sister Joan Glisky, who worked with her there, said Sister Karen was a marvelous pastoral leader, very conscientious and collaborative. She knew all the people in the parish, making it a point to visit them in times of crisis in their families. She frequently was called upon to help finish projects in emergencies.

From 1986 to 1990, Sister Karen was an assistant in the Marian High School library, where her talents for organization and care of others were evident.

In 1990 she returned to pastoral ministry, this time at St. Matthew Parish in Detroit, which was closer to her mother, who needed increasing care. Her strong dedication to the people carried on for the next 18 years. During this time she enjoyed two parish trips to Europe.

In the following quote from the St. Matthew parish paper of Aug. 19, 1990, Sister Karen summed up her years of ministry: “All of my past ministerial experiences gave me opportunities to learn and be challenged as well as to challenge and minister to and with the communities I joined … I look forward to meeting you, praying and ministering with you and your families in the days ahead.”

Sister Karen was often described as personable, a good listener, understanding, helpful and a perfectionist. However, even though she loved to be with and do for others, she was often described as a private person. Her close friend, Sister Mary Copperstone, described Sister Karen’s spirituality as deep and consistent. She frequented Manresa for retreats and Colombiere for monthly prayer days. Her Book of Life page contains only three words: “Come – Journey – Invitation” — stark, but meaningful to her.
Sister Karen was quite active in the Northwest Province and the Mission Units to which she belonged. She also loved to spend summer vacations at Crawfton.

Around 2004, Sister Karen’s friends and ministry companions began to notice Sister Karen’s frequent moments of forgetfulness. In 2008, she moved home to the IHM Memory Care Unit. After some adjustment to the situation, Sister Karen’s talent for helping others became evident on the third floor. It was also a time when Karen was able to renew her relationships with family. She enjoyed frequent visits from Joanne and Ray along with outings, shopping and numerous phone calls. Another close friend, Sister Frances Ryan, visited her often and accompanied her to many in-house activities. Sister Karen always had a smile for everyone and her singing filled the air.

Written by Rose Marie Petranek, IHM; delivered by Marie Markel, IHM
Nov. 8, 2015